

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9433

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 13249

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOPN, IT

SUBJECT: VOA BROADCASTING TO ITALY

REF: STATE 189035

1. EMBASSY AGREES WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S THINKING THAT THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF VOA MEDIUM WAVE TRANSMISSION TO ITALY WOULD NOT MATERIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING THE DESIRED GOAL, I.E. BROAD DIFFUSION ON A REGULAR BASIS OF AUTHORITATIVE U.S. POSITIONS ON KEY FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM IS THAT AFTER SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL OUTLAYS TO GET TRANSMISSIONS OFF THE GROUND--NOT TO MENTION THE ONGOING COSTS TO FUND THE SERVICE--WE WOULD HAVE ONLY A HALF HOUR OF DAILY PROGRAMMING WHICH WOULD REACH A SMALL SECTION OF THE ITALIAN POPULATION AT BEST.

2. WE ALSO CONCUR WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S JUDGEMENT THAT US ATTITUDES AND STATEMENTS HELPED SHAPE THE RECENT ELECTORAL DEBATE. AT THE SAME TIME IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THESE HAVE ALSO BEEN A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE INCREASING POLARIZATION WHICH IS TAKING PLACE IN THE COUNTRY. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THAT THE CURRENT ORIENTATION OF THE BULK OF THE ITALIAN MEDIA IS UNFAVORABLE TO THE UNITED STATES AND THAT STATEMENTS OF US POLICIES AND

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VIEWS DO NOT ALWAYS RECEIVE BALANCED TREATMENT.

THUS A MAJOR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS US IN TRYING TO
ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVE.

3. GIVEN THE APPARENT IMPRACTICALITY OF RESUMING VOA
ITALIAN BROADCASTING, TWO QUESTIONS SEEMINGLY ARISE:
THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES WE HAVE IN MIND IN TERMS OF
DIFFUSING INFORMATION ON US POLICIES AND HOW WE MIGHT
CARRY THIS OUT MOST EFFECTIVELY. REFTEL IS NOT CLEAR
AS TO PRECISELY WHAT DEPARTMENT HAS IN MIND WHEN IT
SPEAKS OF "COMPLETE PRESENTATIONS OF US VIEWS, STATE-
MENTS, AND POSITIONS." WHETHER THIS IS REFERRING TO
POLICIES SOLELY REGARDING ITALY OR TO US POLICIES
IN GENERAL, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT CONCENTRATED
REGULAR RADIO OR TV PROGRAMMING OF THIS TYPE, EVEN
IF IT COULD BE ARRANGED THROUGH A PRIVATE FOREIGN STATION
OR THROUGH STATIONS WHICH ARE SPRINGING UP IN ITALY
AS A RESULT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECISION ENDING
THE RAO RADIO AND TV MONOPOLY, WOULD BE ATTRACTIVE TO
A WIDE AUDIENCE. IN A COUNTRY WITH ONE OF THE LOWEST
NEWSPAPER READERSHIP RATIOS PER CAPITA IN THE
DEVELOPED WORLD, CONCENTRATED PROGRAMMING SUCH AS THIS
SIMPLY IS NOT GOING TO BE ATTRACTIVE TO A LARGE SEGMENT
OF THE POPULATION, ESPECIALLY WITH THE PROLIFERATION
OF NEW STATIONS, EACH COMPETING WITH THE OTHER FOR
AUDIENCE ATTENTION.

4. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, A MORE SUBTLE AND REFINED
APPROACH TO ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE ADOPTED.
DURING RECENT MONTHS WE BELIEVE ONE OF THE MOST
EFFECTIVE METHODS WE HAVE HAD FOR GETTING OUR VIEWS
PLAYED INTO ITALIAN MEDIA HAS BEEN THROUGH THE PICK-UP
OF AUTHORITATIVE NEWS STORIES ON US POLICY APPEARING
IN THE AMERICAN PRESS. INCREASED COORDINATION
BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT AND THE EMBASSY ASSUCH ARTICLES
APPEAR IN THE FUTURE COULD INCREASE THE POSSIBILITIES OF
MORE EFFECTIVE REPLAY OF THIS TYPE OF MATERIAL HERE.
ADDITIONALLY, OCCASIONAL AND JUDICIOUS INTERVIEWS
BETWEEN US DECISION MAKERS AND RESPONSIBLE ITALIAN
JOURNALISTS SHOULD BE UTILIZED, AS THE NEED IS PERCEIVED,
TO PRESENT OUR POLICY EXPLANATIONS TO THE ITALIAN
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POPULATION. (WHILE OUR MESSAGE MIGHT NOT ALWAYS BE
APPRECIATED BY ALL SEGMENTS OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM,
THE DEBATE THAT IT STIMULATES INSURES AN EVEN BROADER
DISSEMINATION OF OUR VIEWS.) FINALLY, WHILE WE
REALIZE THAT RADIO AND TV, ESPECIALLY IN THE MORE
LIBERALIZED PERIOD AHEAD, HAVE LIMITATIONS, WE SHOULD
AGGRESSIVELY SEEK OUT OPPORTUNITIES TO PLACE SPECIAL
INTEREST ITEMS (CULTURAL, MUSICAL, HISTORICAL) EITHER

WITH ESTABLISHED STATIONS OR ONES LIKELY TO SPRING UP
IN THE FUTURE. THE GOAL OF THIS EFFORT WOULD BE TO
PROJECT A CERTAIN OVERALL IMAGE OF THE US.

5. CONCERNING THE APPLICABILITY OF THE RECENT CONSTI-
TUTIONAL COURT DECISION TO AFN OPERATIONS IN ITALY, OUR
FIRST ANALYSIS INDICATES THAT THERE IS STILL NO LEGAL
BASIS ON WHICH WE MIGHT HOPE TO LEGITIMIZE
THEIR STATUS HERE IN THE COUNTRY. IN ANY
EVENT, IF THE DEPARTMENT IS THINKING OF THE POSSIBILITY
OF UTILIZING AFN FOR THE PURPOSES OF DIFFUSING US
GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES AND POSITIONS, WE WOULD VIEW THE
IDEA NEGATIVELY. THE DISADVANTAGES STEMMING FROM THE
ALL-ENGLISH NATURE OF THE TRANSMISSION (THUS LIMITED
AUDIENCES) AND THE POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS SUCH BROAD-
CASTS COULD HAVE ON OUR MILITARY PRESENCE HERE WOULD
SEEM TO FAR OUTWEIGH THE MARGINAL GAINS THAT COULD
POSSIBLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE USE OF THIS MEDIUM.VOLPE

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